The Girl with the Tartan Scarf
John Armstrong Walker

The Girl with the Tartan Scarf
a cosmos original 2015
John A.Walker
www.cosmos-original-productions.co.uk

Copyright © John A.Walker
2015 Copyright © John A.Walker.
The right of John A.Walker to be identified as author of
this work has been asserted in accordance with the
Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1998.
Conditions of Sale:
1. This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall
not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired
out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or
cover other than that in which it is published and
without a similar condition including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in
any form or by any means, without permission in writing
from Cosmos Original Productions.
published by Cosmos Original Productions, Glasgow.

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
Ecclesiastes 3:8

To men without mothers

Chapter 1

When Mary was on her own, or with someone, it did not matter, she loved to sing the Judy Garland song to herself: *Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high. There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby...*

Somewhere between birth, marriage and death, it seemed to contain the happiest moments of her life. Words can trigger the truth, and we all know they can also hide it. So where should we start with this story? It was true the First World War ended two years before she was born. This was a time when homes were being built for heroes, and the first one hundred women went to study for full degrees at Oxford University.

However, this story will start as follows. What is known is that it was a happy childhood. Mary was born at Kelvinside nursing home in the west end of Glasgow, and a few years later she had a brother Alec, and a sister Lucy. Her mother came from Manchester; her father from Glasgow. Sadly, he died relatively young, of a chest complaint. Mary being the elder sister had to take on responsibilities early on in life. She had a steady presence, a good nature, and quiet determinism. People noticed this about her. She went to Temple school.

The family due to one reason or another moved to different places, around Hayburn Street, Woodhouse Street, in the west end of Glasgow. Looking back, she remembered after school all their friends would come round to their house in Hayburn Street. Mary had lots of friends, as did her sister Lucy. The main attraction was that her mother could read tea cups, and of course everyone was interested in knowing what the future held for them.

1st of May, 1944. Dates, it is fair to say, must signify something, still nobody knows what life is all about. All that can be said about it is that nothing can stop it - whatever it is - it just goes on its mysterious way. Some people maintain that life is unkind, others that it flies by like an express train, heading for some mysterious destination. It will all be over before you know it. Only philosophers deliberate about it. Ordinary people of course think about life; they are more existential though. 'You have to get on with things, or you will go mad,' that's what people said to her.

Of course, when she went to bed at night, she could escape all her troubles: *Goodnight Sweetheart*, *sleep will banish sorrow*. Al Bowly.

Mary was all grown up by now, looking good, and ready to embrace all the things that a woman was meant to do in life. She celebrated her birthday just last month. Mary was well out of her teens now. Was it time to take stock, or push on? It was true another year had just passed her by, and she had hardly noticed it. She knew that the external events of life you could do nothing about. The country was still at war. Even though things were difficult at the moment, she was full of fun. Things maybe tight, but there was plenty of work about. It was just as well she looked on the bright side: every cloud has a silver lining.

Mary being the oldest sister had to take on responsibilities early on in life. People noticed that she could be quiet, but she was always ready to take part in things. Her working life started as a machinist at Jack Mandels in Glasgow. There they produced clothing for the retail industry. She was a good machinist; she loved sewing. The girls heard about other jobs all the time; word soon got round her friends about a place called Twomax. It had a factory just outside the city centre of Glasgow.

Much was said about the area the Gorbals. However, during the day the factories were busy there, and whatever happened in the area at night did not affect the workers. When her friends heard about the wage they were offering at Twomax, they all left Jack Mandels, and went to work there.

On her first day at Twomax, Mary met a young Jewish girl who had just converted to Christianity, Celia Goldstien. She made an immediate impression on her. Mary could see that although Celia was persecuted, because of her religion, she put her faith in Jesus. The problem about her origin came about after the supervisor heard about her conversion, and from that day on kept an eye on her. All the girls said the same thing about the supervisor, Miss Robertson, she was an old battle axe.

Like Mary, the girls in the factory loved to go dancing. Celia did not go though. Nevertheless, Mary noticed that she was never dull in company.

There may have been a war on, but it was still a great time to have fun. Men were always on the lookout for young single women. And young women were always on the lookout for single men; nothing had changed there. Like all young ladies, Mary had to have her guard up. She gave thanks that her beauty was protected by her shyness. She had noticed that a woman without reservation soon found herself in the wrong company. Like all young ladies in the factory, she dreamed of falling in love. There was a time for that. She noticed life had mysterious ways of bringing people together. Directors in the movies seemed to understand this, and they tried to capture it on film. There was nothing like studying real people though to find out life's secrets.

The retail industry changed production, of course, during the war to make uniforms and greatcoats for the soldiers. Mary wanted to join up, and do her bit. She had written to join the Women's Land Army, and was waiting for a reply.

On the way to work today, she brought along a Woman's magazine, October edition, 1939. She had picked this up on the tram last week, but she did not have time to read it over the weekend. The cover had an idyllic picture of a couple on horseback. She could see that this was from a short story inside by *May Marshal*. Mary read a little bit of the story, but soon went on to other articles that were more her kind of thing. These articles had interesting headings: *Table linen; When you are married; How to care for your baby*. In no time at all, the tram stopped outside the factory gate. Many people got off here; it was a busy area. Mary and her sister Lucy, who was also reading, both looked up. They quickly put away their magazines, and alighted the tram. There was a war on, and it was another day at work.

Mary, as soon as she sat down at her machine, looked around for Celia. She knew this was the day when Miss Robertson was going to try to sack her. However, as luck would have it, Celia had hurt her arm at the weekend, and could not come in. The morning passed quite quickly, and in no time at all, the girls put on their long coats, and headed for the graveyard for lunch. They always did this. One of her colleagues in front of her, as she danced out of the door, cried: "I wonder whose grave I am going to sit on today?"

As it happened a young man delivering fabric to the department, trying to get passed the girls, had to stop to let her through. He shouted back at her: "As long as it's not yours - you will be all right!" and everyone laughed.

At the end of the week, Mary was called into the office by Miss Robertson. The old battle-ax - as the girls called her - wanted to see her. Mary of course wondered what it was all about. She finished what she was doing. Whatever thoughts came into her mind to enlighten her, she dismissed them. Why should she worry about that? All afternoon she had been thinking about going with the girls to the dancing tonight. She was in a good mood.

There were so many dance halls to choose from in Glasgow: the Locarno, the Albert, the Empire, the Plaza. They were all great. The girls had yet to decide where they were going tonight? What should she put on? Mary was always making dresses for herself, and trying them out was great fun. And who would be there tonight? She could see in her imagination the stage revolving around the Plaza dance floor, and the bands changing position. The crowds of people moving to and from the floor. Nothing in life could ever compare to the electric atmosphere of a Glasgow dance hall.

Miss Robertson stood behind her wooden desk like a matron. When Mary walked in she saw her standing there, so she closed the door gently behind her. Presently, she stood in front of her desk, and looked down on it. There she could see the desk was almost empty, except for an unread copy of the Daily Herald and a brown wage poke.

In a condescending voice, the old Battle-ax explained: "Celia is still off sick; I want you to leave early tonight, and take her wages to her.

Mary looked up and smiled: "Yes, I will do that, Miss Robertson."

Mary was happy. The opportunity would give her the chance to see her friend. Celia was always interested in the girls, even though she told them off. As if she was in the room, Mary could hear her say: "You lot will never get to heaven."

It was true, Celia was always rebuking the girls at lunchtime for the way they talked to each other. She knew she stayed in Ardgown Street. Mary had visited her once before there. In a good mood, Mary lifted the pay poke, beside the paper, and left the office.

An hour later, Celia opened the door to her tenement flat, and welcomed Mary inside.

"Are you okay? Mary asked kindly, after her friend.

"Come in Mary."

Mary could see that she was well, but had a bandage on her arm. "A funny thing happened to me; I fell down in the kitchen and hurt my wrist, but it is fine now."

Although in good spirits, Mary could see that she was off colour. She told her: "Sit down, and I will tidy up for you."

After she did this, she combed her lovely long auburn hair: "Robertson is fizzing. She thought you would be in today, so that she could sack you."

Celia did not say anything, as Mary combed her hair. She just sat there quietly. This was what fascinated Mary about her. She could see that trial, and tribulation, seemed to be accepted by her friend. Even when anti-Jewish sentiments were hurled at her on the street, she did not flinch. Mary liked to watch Celia preach the Gospel to the heathens. As a young woman, she had turned to the Lord and joined her local Church. This brought abuse from the unbelievers; they had no respect for any religious person, let alone a Jewess who had converted to Christianity. Mary's mother thought it dangerous and forbid her, and her sister Lucy, to follow Celia, as she preached in Glasgow. Mary thought it all rather exciting. Celia was definitely different, as everyone could see who looked at her.

Mary finished combing her hair. She suddenly realised that she was going dancing tonight, and before that she had to meet her mother outside Marks and Spencer in Argyle Street. Her mother was looking at a new coat for her. She would have to go home and get changed. She said in a hurried tone: "I will need to go, Celia. I will see you soon."

On the way back into town, she sat down beside a white-haired man wearing a dark-blue duffle coat. He was older than she was. It was unusual to see a man with that colour of hair; he was an albino. She noticed he was reading the Times, front page. He seemed respectable enough. However, as she sat down, Mary did not smile at him. With her father gone, she wanted to meet someone kind. It was the way of the world. Her friends said that there were men out there who did not like women; they only wanted to use them. It was true to say that most men were friendly, but you had to ignore them at first, until you were sure they were decent. There were few good men around - that was true. Celia seemed to know about these kinds of things. Although, she had never heard Celia utter a bad word against any man or woman. Mary relaxed, took out her purse, and got ready to pay the clippy.

Just before the tram went over the bridge and back into the city again, the man with the white hair turned to look at her. He said in an educated voice: "Excuse me, please."

Mary stood up, and when he had passed by, she sat back down again. She had a few more stops to go before the tram entered the shops in the city centre. Mary loved the time she had travelling alone. With nothing

much to do, she brought out her powder case and lightly touched her face. It was strange, for just as she clipped it shut, she noticed a white envelope on the floor. It was where the man with the white hair and dark duffle coat had sat. She bent down and picked it up. Mary was always sure about making decisions, but in this instance, she wondered what to do.

She smiled as an idea popped into her mind: "There will no doubt be an address inside, that I can send it to."

Thereafter, she put the white envelope in her handbag, clasped it shut, and got off at Marks and Spencer. As arranged, her mother was standing outside the Argyle Street store entrance. She was glad to see her get off the tram: "Mary, I have found a lovely coat for you. Come on hurry up, or it will be gone. They have put it aside for you."

"When did you see it?" asked Mary as they went inside.

"Never mind, come on..."

Upstairs in the department store, they eventually found the woman who had put it by for her. Mary quite liked it. She tried it on again and again. Even though it was nice, she was cautious: "I will sleep on it, mother."

This was sensible, and her mother did not mind her saying this. She would give her the money if she wanted to buy it. Mary actually forgot all about the white envelope she found on the tram. That night as usual after Cocoa, she went to bed. She did not sleep well though. She was thinking about what some friends had said to her about going to Australia, after this horrible war was over. It seemed exciting to travel such a long way and start a new life.

Staying in the west end of Glasgow was dangerous: for the German planes just a few years ago had targeted Clydebank. There the shipyards produced ships and munitions. No one knew what was going to happen next. If the Germans thought bombing the houses in the area would weaken the resolve of the people, they were wrong. It was true that hundreds of people had died in the attacks, and thousands were made homeless. The attacks, however, did not have the effect they intended. In fact, it strengthened the resolve of the Scottish people against the Hun.

At that time, when the German bombers were attacking Clydebank, Mary and her friend had been caught out. They were at the Plaza dancehall that night. The tram never turned up to take them home. In the dark they had to walk all the way to the west end. It was well known many people had been killed by traffic in the blackout, so they were careful. The streets were safe, but the skies were not. The sky may be infinite but, when German planes flew overhead, the world seemed an awfully small place.

That night they had to hide in a doorway, at the far end of Sauchiehall Street, until the planes had passed over the city. Another time when they were all in the house at night, it shook after a bomb landed near them, although no one was hurt.

That night lying in bed, she remembered the white envelope she had found on the bus that day. The blackout was still enforced; she knew she would have to wait until the morning to read it.

Chapter 2

After breakfast, she grabbed her bag and once more Mary, and her younger sister Lucy, headed for another day at the factory. With no magazine to read today on the tram, she remembered the envelope she found on Friday. Mary went into her bag and opened the unsealed white envelope and read the contents: *'Top Secret: Operation Neptune, First week in June 1944.*'

There was also a paragraph, under the heading with some instructions, which read: 'Please arrange a meeting with Mr Wallenberg in London, and exchange presents with him before returning to Glasgow.'

Mary could tell by the stamp Top Secret that it was important. Although she wanted to tell Lucy, she did not. In any event, she could see her sister was busy reading a magazine about the new film: *Double Indemnity*, featuring, Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray. The film was just about to be released. Lucy seemed quite engrossed in the story. She put the letter in its envelope, and back into her bag again.

Mary wondered if she should speak to Celia about it. She trusted her judgement. Once settled at her machine, she looked around for her friend, but she could see that she was not at her machine today, or anywhere on the factory floor. She must be still off sick. The factory was always busy and noisy. It was an interesting place to work. The machinists loved to chat to each other as they sewed and stitched. Mary started working right away. One of the things she always thought about was: who she was sewing for. The great coats they made left the factory as soon as they were finished, but where they went to she did not know. Someone said they all went down south.

About half an hour later, Lucy came over to where Mary was working: "Celia has left; she has got a job with the church in Ardgown Street."

Mary looked up at once. She wanted to finish what she was doing. She was caught by surprise. In any event, she had her sewing needle in her mouth: for she was picking at the stitching inside the coat. She did not know what to say. To give herself time to think, Mary turned the greatcoat over to check the stitching on the other side. Then she took the needle from her mouth and inserted it into the coat, in preparation to sew the button on. Lucy did not say anything else. When Mary looked up again, her sister had gone back to her place of work. "Where do all the answers to unknown questions lie?' she wondered. "Well, someone in the world out there must know."

Mary, sitting by the large window, just stared out over in the direction of the river Clyde, as if to search for that person to tell her about Celia. The early spring light and the still water reflected hope for everyone, even those who had been forced out of work. Images of her friend soon came to mind. Life may be difficult, but things came all right for Celia. The strange thing was that she knew Celia would always be her friend, even if she never saw her again - that was a strange thought was it not. Something had touched Mary deep inside; having a friend who thought and prayed for you made her happy.

She smiled as she looked over towards the Paisley area where she knew she stayed. With her conversion had come hostility, but she always remained calm and serene. Celia was a steady presence. She loved preaching the Word of the Lord. The world may be a terrible place, but she could see that her friend was given the help to overcome it.

"Celia knows the bible from A to Z," that's what all the girls said.

"You lot will never get to Heaven," she could hear her saying to them at lunchtime.

The following week after work, Mary was on her own on the tram. She was heading back into the city. The tram was quite quiet. Monday at work, all things considered, had gone reasonably well for her. After looking out of the window, and watching the water pass by under the bridge, a man sat down beside her. There was a feeling of strangeness in the air. That was not unusual in itself. It was most definitely this, however, that alerted Mary to who was sitting beside her. It was the man with the white hair and the dark-blue duffle-coat. Mary got a fright and quickly looked away.

In a reverent low tone, the man turned to her and said: "My name is Jack. I believe, you have something for me?"

After watching the girls at the dancing, Mary knew how to chase away strange men, by a sharp word, or stare. This was different though. She did not hesitate; she went immediately into her bag and handed him the white envelope. There was no address on it; she could not post it. It was not her business anyway - nothing to do with her. She noticed that Jack calmly put the envelope away inside a pocket in his duffle coat.

The tram was just about to enter the city centre. Mary had been looking forward to trying the coat on again. She knew the store was open late tonight. She said: "Excuse me," and got up to get off at Argyle Street, Marks and Spencer.

The man in the duffle coat stood up and let her passed. This was always a busy stop along the route with people getting on and off. Mary glanced behind her. She noticed that he too was getting off at this stop. Mary hoped she had seen the last of him.

Just as she entered the store, she heard his low voice again. "I know you have read the document. I can't let you go without speaking to you." and after a pause, he added: "Let me tell you something about myself; I work for a government department in the city."

Mary had not a clue what he was talking about. "I am sorry. I have an appointment - have to meet someone."

Normally, this would have done it, and she would move away with ease from whoever it was that was trying to apprehend her.

Jack firmly gripped her arm, as he asked her: What is your name?"

She turned and looked at him. She felt caught, as if in a trap: "Mary, I know you know the date, so therefore I could have you locked up until operations have been completed," he said in a light-hearted tone.

Mary was shocked. If this had just been a drunk man, or a wayward lad, she would have belted him with her handbag and yelled out for help.

"Let's go over there to that tearoom, across the road, and work something out. Shall we?"

Mary could do nothing, but follow him. She was calm, as she made her way out of the store. It was just as well her mother was not there. Then on second thoughts he may not have spoken to her like that, if she had been there.

Once outside the department store, Jack released his grip: "Yes, let's go to Mr Campbell's tearoom, over there," and he pointed across the road to where it was situated. "It is a very old established tearoom, you know, and has a good reputation."

Mary had many times passed by it, but she had never been inside. She often wondered what type of people went there. She knew that certain types went to certain places in the city. Mary was like her mother: she went to ordinary places, nothing highfalutin. The social structure of Glasgow had a class system all of its own. However, having said that, like all clever systems, it was easily worked out by those in the know; once seen somewhere, you were quickly categorised.

"I suppose you prefer Henderson's in Sauchiehall Street."

Mary did not say anything, ever the optimist, she wondered what she would be getting to eat. Like all young ladies, she had a passion for tea and cakes. As they entered the establishment, Mary's eye was drawn immediately to the clean tablecloths on the tables, then what decorated them: scones, cakes, eclairs, strawberry tarts, marzipan, walnut cake with toffee topping, shortbread, fruit slices, and gingerbread with thick icing. Mary looked away for fear of giving away her hungry thoughts. As the strange man beckoned her to go inside, she read the poster by the door: *Luncheon, Dinners and Teas, Snack Rooms, Ladies Room and Separate Smoking Room*.

Jack could see that his guest was impressed by her surroundings: "Did you know that we invented the tearoom?"

Mary shyly looked away: "Who did?"

"The Glaswegians."

To reassure herself, she nodded as if she had. Mary decided that she would get a pot of tea and a strawberry tart. She could almost hear her machinist friends at Twomax egging her on: 'Go on Mary, don't hold back, go for the lot - he's got a few bob.'

Jack waited for his guest to sit at the table. When seated, he too sat down. On the face of it, he did not appear to be a charming man, but he had been trained to put people at ease. His tone gave this away: "It was around 1875. I believe, an invention brought along at the time of the Temperance movement. It must have filled a gap, I guess. We were described as 'a very Tokio for tearooms,' you know. Anyway, great cities followed us: Paris, Vienna, London. I am sure you can impress your friends by telling them that."

The traditional waitress appeared in her black-and-white uniform. She did not look like anything out of the ordinary. As she had been trained to do she stood for a moment with her hand on her hip. When the silence became too long for her, she looked down at the man and in a squeaky voice asked him: "Can I help you, sir?"

Seeing that Mary was not ready to order, he quickly said: "Thank you, I will have a pot of tea and a scone?" then he looked at the menu, as if he had missed something. The waitress sensed that he had not finished speaking, and she did not take her eyes off him: "And the young lady will tell you what she wants."

Mary put down the menu, then she picked it up again. Close up now she could see the waitress was younger than she was, and like her was quite shy. As if she was one of the factory girls who sat on the gravestones with her at lunchtime. She smiled at her, trying to impart who she was, and why she was here: "I will have a pot of tea and a strawberry tart, please."

Mary was always thoughtful about people serving her: for she knew that could be her one day. There was a friendly atmosphere in the tearoom. She recognised it right away. It was something she knew from going out with her mother. She was starting to enjoy herself, and almost forgot why she was here: press-ganged into a meeting with someone who said they worked for a government agency, all because she had found a letter on a tram.

Jack could see that the young lady opposite him was happy now, having afternoon tea in a fine establishment in town. It was no bother to him at all to keep the conversation going: "I am afraid many of these old tearooms are shutting," he said picking up his napkin. "Due to the conflict, I am afraid our lovely world of tearooms, Ice cream parlours, milk bars and picture halls are all closing down, disappearing from sight."

The young waitress appeared again, this time with two hot teapots. She then returned immediately with two plates, one with a large fruit scone, and the other with a lovely strawberry tart.

"Are you a machinist at Twomax?" he asked.

Mary could tell that Jack was a man who was exact in every detail. He did not speak without thinking - no doubt a church elder in his local parish. The image he presented to the outside world was a fine one. He looked like the proverbial pillar of the community. Mary knew she could not deceive him. She decided to be honest. This was always the best policy, after all she had done nothing wrong.

"Yes, I started there at the beginning of the year."

"You like it?"

"Very much."

There was a long silence after this. Mary really enjoyed the strawberry tart. While she was eating it, she absolutely forgot where she was. When she finished it, she picked up her China cup, and smiled to herself. As a young girl, she perfected her pinkie technique. She had heard

that this was how the toffs drank tea, with a slight affectation as they called it. And here she was today in a posh place in the city centre. Well, why not show it off. The way she did it was not exaggerated, but just enough to signal to anyone looking at her that she understood the manners of the gentry, even though she was not one of them.

Strangely enough at that moment she noticed two women, beautifully dressed. They were sitting at the far end of the restaurant. They looked to her like mother and daughter. The daughter, Mary thought, looked about thirty years of age. She had never seen them before in the city. Mary could see that the daughter was wearing the latest fashion, from some exclusive designer, like Doir. The cream dress had shoulder pads. Few women could afford this. Even if you had the money, few would dare to wear it while the war was still on. The older woman was dressed in tweeds. She knew there were many rich women in Glasgow.

The rich would always be rich; they would always be mysterious. Mary liked her working class status. She had no interest in being rich. She dreamed of being married, and free from a world at war. Mary would always be working class; this she knew. There was nothing unusual about that; everyone she knew was working class. Everyone that is except this man sitting across from her.

"I have spoken to your boss, Miss Robertson, and asked her to give you paid leave for two weeks." He paused after he said this, and stared into her brown eyes, as if to confirm the agreement: "I want you to go to London. I want you to deliver a message to a man named Mr Wallenberg.

Mary was baffled. She found herself looking down at the empty plate, where once there had been a lovely strawberry tart. "Why choose me?"

"Well, since you now know the date of the party, you have become part of the Double Cross team. You see this date is very important to the war effort. We cannot take any chances with it."

She asked herself: "Do I have a choice?"

Mary understood that she would have to do it. There was no way of getting out of it; the country was at war, after all. And she would not be able to tell a soul either.

"Will Miss Robertson really let me go; for the factory is very busy?"

"My friend owns a linen thread company, here in the city. He has spoken to the owners. Everything is fine." Jack paused, and looked for the waitress, "We should meet here again next Monday, and I will prepare you for the voyage, and of course for what you have to do."

Mary, like most working class girls, had never been further than the Isle of Man. And that was only last year when her sister, and her friend Marion, went there for a week. They had a real fun time; the weather was fine. Due to a lack of accommodation, however, they had all slept in the one big double bed. It was a nice boarding house, even though it was strict. Mary loved her holidays. This trip to London sounded like a paid vacation - well almost.

She may not be able to tell her friends, but she knew they would be with her. It seemed to be the way, Celia and Marion were always in her thoughts. In her daydreams and loneliness, she communed with them. They were real friends; she could trust them. It was comforting to know she would never be alone in life.

"What time?" Mary responded.

Leaning back and looking over at the counter again for the waitress, Jack replied: "Let's say one o'clock."

This time another young waitress caught his eye and came forward with the bill. Even though Jack appeared to her a mean character, tight-fisted and dour, Mary noticed he gave the waitress a good tip.

Chapter 3

Mary went along to work the next day, only to be told that she had a month off. There did indeed seem to be a plan in place for her. As soon as Mary sat down at her machine, Miss Robertson shouted over to her to come into her office.

Inside the small tidy manager's office, everything the man she had met on the tram said to her was confirmed: "Mary, you have a month off on full pay," reported her boss: "The War Office want you, for some reason, or other."

When she came out of the office, right away her sister Lucy came over and asked her: "What's going on, Mary?"

The girls in the factory all looked over at her. Mary could not quite understand it herself: "They want me for some assignment. It will probably come to nothing; I have to go to London."

Even though there was a war on, like all young women, Mary took advantage of every opportunity. She would now go and get her mother; they could look at that coat again. Her mother, like her, needed no opportunity to shop. She would, of course, tell her about the forthcoming trip to the capital of Britain. She could not say much more though. Mary finished what she was doing and said goodbye to the girls.

So that afternoon Mary met her mother in her favourite tearoom in the west end of Glasgow. Mary knew she would be there. That's where she always met her cronies every Tuesday. After a pot of tea, they headed for the city centre. Her mother even though she had a tired heart still went out most days. The doctor told her this; he must know. Life was not only for the young. Mary knew this; for there was a wealthy man who wanted to

marry her mother. Her mother was having none of it though. His name was Mr McKendrick. Apparently, they knew each other a long time ago. He was not from money, but he had made quite a bit of it over the years in the furniture business. Mary thought it great fun. She did not have a problem with it. Mary remembered her father with fond affection. He died young. He was a postman. Mary remembered how he had suffered from a chest complaint. She put this down to all the long hours, and miles he had to walk every day: for that was his job. In fact, one resident even complained that he was late with the mail most days. She was soon given the silent treatment by the other neighbours.

There were funny times too. She remembered fondly every day her mother made him a piece to take with him to work. She always put it in a knapsack for him. One time he opened it in the sorting office, and lo and behold a mouse jumped out of it. No wonder his mates round about him roared with laughter. The family had problems with this kind of thing at Woodhouse Street. The timber houses there were easily infiltrated due to the cracks in the wooden floors. The tenement flat where they stayed now in Byres Road was much better.

On the tram, Mary explained everything to her as best she could: why she was on paid leave. Her mother thought it funny, but she just said: "Take care Mary, do your bit, but be careful."

At the usual stop, Mary and her mother got off the tram, and went into Marks and Spencer. She was looking forward to seeing the coat again. Customers coming and going could not help but notice the sign by the door telling them how Marks employees had collected £5000, towards a Spitfire, for the war effort. You could see by the poster that someone in the company named the plane the Marksman. The shop was quite busy - it always was. This was Mary's favourite store. She loved browsing, going from stall to stall. She wished she could one day get a job here. Now that would be something. It was a different woman who was there at the counter where they sold coats and jackets. When her turn came Mary said to the assistant: "We put a coat by the other day. Can we look at it again, please?"

Mary thought a lot about it over the weekend. She really liked the coat, even though it was quite expensive. However, a strange thing happened, when the woman brought out the coat and laid it on the counter; Mary noticed something different about it. Although, it was the same type - it was not the same one. Her mother, who had taken a seat by the fitting room, stood up and came over to look at it. She did not notice the change,

but Mary's sharp eye did. Even before she tried it on again, she sensed that something was wrong.

Her mother was surprised. She looked up when she heard Mary say to the assistant: "No thanks, I will just leave it," and indicated to her that they should go.

Her mother was curious. On the way out of the store, she asked her: "You did not like it, Mary?"

"I did, but it was not the same one. Someone has switched it - that was a different one, than I tried on the other day."

Her mother smiled to herself: "In life, Mary, you have got to grab things right away, or they disappear, you know."

Life was like that, was it not? On the face of it, things seemed to appear as normal, but you had to look again. Mary had good senses. Her initial view was sharp, but she knew that it was only after thinking about things, looking at them again, that you could really get at the truth. Men and women deceived in different ways. Very few people were genuine.

When she thought about it, that man Jack was not all that he seemed. The first time she saw him on the tram, even though it was only a glance, he seemed not to be part of the surroundings. He appeared to be elsewhere, or wishing to be elsewhere. However, when he approached her in the store, he was very much part of the surroundings. His manner was severe, trained to control. He seemed to be a stranger in a strange land. Even though he was from Scotland, he had foreign ways. Mary knew that when she could not put her finger on it, there was something missing, something was up.

Mary loved sewing at home; this kept her busy. She forgot all about life when she had a needle and thread in her hand. She helped her mother in the house, and as usual went with her friends to the dancing at the Albert, the Lacarno and the Plaza, in the evening. There was dancing on just about every other night. The war had not stopped people having fun.

Naturally, her friends when she met them were keen to know what her assignment was. Putting it to the back of her mind, she told them: "I have no idea; I have to meet him next week."

The dancing was always fantastic. The danger was coming home in the dark though. It was well-known that many people had been killed and injured, not by mad men, or Germans, but by trams and other vehicles in the blackout.

Mary was streetwise. She could tell who was who in society, and if she needed to speak to someone about something, she knew what to do. Her brother she could see was at a difficult age. He was well into his teens now, thinking about joining the army. He was searching for things. This

was what most young lads did. He was at an awkward age; he would not walk with his mother or sisters anymore, when they were out together, Mary thought it unusual, and she would laugh when she saw him crossing the road, or going on ahead. She knew he missed his father most of all. It was natural for young ladies to expect things to happen to them. Mary and Lucy were dreaming about what may indeed happen to them. They were looking to meet someone, get married and settle down. There may be a war on, but needs must. Not to love and be loved was unthinkable. Mary was good at spotting the potential of someone, even just for a chat.

She laughed to herself when she thought of her sister and friends on holiday. They had gone down the coast, and when they had nothing to do, they would stand in queues and talk to people. They never bought anything out of the shops: for they could not afford it. However, just standing in the queue made them part of what was going on. They could chat away to others quite the thing.

The weekends were always great. People made the best of things. The future maybe uncertain, but this made people alive in the present. Everyone was in the same boat. Many families had lost someone in the war. There was great respect for young women among the men who lived in the local area of the west end. There were many widows, fatherless children. The ones you had to watch were the foreigners. Every day you would see soldiers in the city. People did not like it when the foreigners grabbed the tables in the restaurants before them. Of course, all foreigners were not pushy.

Just recently, Mary met a Dutch lad. He was stationed in the west end. She was keeping in touch with him while he was here on duty. He seemed a nice lad. He was the kind she liked. He had a nice smile, and was not self-opinionated, or unruly. His name was Albert. Her friends often pulled her leg: "Did you meet Albert at the Albert, Mary?" Then they would sing to her the song:

There's a little Dutch mill
On a little Dutch hill
Where the little Dutch stars shine bright
Now a little Dutch boy
And his little Dutch Girl
Fell in love by the mill one night

No one was sure if Mary liked the song written by *Ralph Freed/ Harry Barris,* but she went along with it. It was well known that the Albert

ballroom was named after Prince Albert. It had a good reputation in the city; it was a well-run establishment situated in Bath Street. People said that this was where they used to do the Charleston in the old days.

As they came back from the town that day, Mary wondered how Celia was getting on. She heard she had got work with her local church. She looked out for her on the street, but no sign so far though. It was the way it was. There was a chance that she may not see her again; Glasgow was a big city. Celia did not go to the dancing, or to the restaurants or cafe bars in the city. Twomax would never be the same again without her. You could rely on Celia to preach the truth to you, during work, at lunch, or after it. It was true what her mother said to her about Celia. "Many were called, but few are chosen."

Mary that night listened to the *Kitchen Front* on the radio. She knew there would be interesting people on the programme, giving good advice and helpful tips. How to feed yourself was always uppermost in the minds of both the commentators, and the listeners. Dig for Victory was the slogan used at the beginning of the war, and ever since then vegetable plots had sprung up all over the place. Her mother did not have one yet. The family relied solely on their ration books; every citizen had one. Even though they did not have a refrigerator, nothing was wasted. They preferred to eat at home. She remembered one of the girls joking at work: "We should all save up and go for a meal in a restaurant."

It was five shillings for a meal in a restaurant in town. Mary's friends went out for a coffee, but they never went out for a meal."

The people in the country seemed better off; they had all the fruits of the forrest to eat. The townies did not have that. At the library, Mary read *Thrift Class*, by the National Federation of Women's Institutes. This of course helped her to mend and maintain things, but it did not feed her. Not long ago the government set-up a non-profit making board, run by local committees. These were in effect restaurants in church halls, and other outlets. They provided a meal for 1s 6d. Mary heard that they were very good.

It was an offence to stockpile food at home, or anywhere else for that matter. At the outset, people of course did this, but as the war went on, it was discouraged. Food in the shops was in short supply now. If you did get your hands-on tins of food, and were caught, you could be heavily fined or even jailed. Soap was rationed, as was butter, eggs, sugar, bacon, meat. Thankfully, chicken was still available, fish more difficult to get, no bananas. The Ministry of Food, through leaflets, was always telling people how to make pies, stews, puddings. soups and salads. What was left in the

larder was always to be used. Reports were everywhere that there was not enough food in the country, and that cattle were having to be slaughtered to make way for crops. Even though people said the war in Europe would be over soon, the future was still uncertain.

As arranged, they met in the same restaurant as before, and as it happened, they sat at the same table. The only thing different was the waitress. It was another young lady, dressed in the standard black-and-white uniform, that served them. She was older, and not so timid. Jack tried to be friendly, as if everyone knew him in the tearoom. He looked odd with his white hair, and he had on his duffle coat again. Everyone was in the same boat right enough backing the war effort. The only strangers these days were the men and women fighting on the other side.

When the waitress had gone, he turned to Mary and said softly: "I have brought with me the letter you have to take to London. Please keep it safe."

Jack took the white envelope out of his pocket, and placed the letter on the restaurant table. It was the same type of envelope as Mary had picked up on the tram.

"Inside the letter, there is important information. You will take the train to London, and make your way to a hotel in Westminster, and there wait to be contacted. I believe, Mr Wallenberg is coming from Wandsworth. The hotel you will stay in is the St Landelin Hotel. It is a fine establishment, situated near St James Park, close to the parliament, and the palace. You will find it very comfortable there."

Mary visited the isle of Man with her friends last year, but that is as far as she had been. Of course, she had read about the capital, and like thousands of others had seen it in the movies, in books and magazines. Well, she had to do it, there was a war on. Plenty of people were in trouble abroad; she knew that much.

Mary thought about telling her mother all of this. What would she think? She had of course told her that she had been called to help the war effort, after finding an envelope on the tram. Nothing more than that though.

Once again, Jack ordered for both of them. This time it was more than a coffee and a strawberry tart on offer: "Trust me on this. You get the best afternoon meal here in the city."

Mary quite enjoyed it. She had never had a meal out before. Mary felt quite important. She had braised meat, potatoes with root vegetables, followed by a summer pudding, stewed fruit, served with custard.

"Have you told you parents about what is happening?"

Mary was quite defensive. She nodded, then quietly said: "Yes."

The less she told Jack about her family the better. Hopefully, this war will be over soon, and everyone can get back to normal, just like the song sung by Vera Lynn said:

When they sound the last all-clear
How happy, my darling, we'll be
When they turn up the lights
And the dark lonely nights
Are only a memory

Life was strange she knew that much. As if to prove it, just at that moment her thoughts were echoed by the man sitting across from her from the War Office. "There is a good chance, you know, it could all be over by the end of the year."

Mary was glad for something easy to say: "Hope so."

It was now difficult to imagine the country not at war. Mary noticed that Jack, on the other hand, indicated that when it was all over, it would take a while before things got back to normal. In an all-knowing tone, he told her: "Oh, I would say it will take a decade, maybe more before the country gets back on its feet again."

Mary had a good sense of humour. She thought to herself: "You really know how to cheer someone up, don't you."

"When do I leave?" she asked, picking up the envelope from the table.

Jack looked for the waitress to order coffee. Then he looked back at Mary. "You will leave on Monday. The tickets will be bought for you before you board the train. Of course, you will be travelling First Class. Please be at Glasgow Central station at 7 15,, in the morning. I will be there, standing by platform two, and will accompany you on the journey to London. The train leaves at 7 30 am. It is the Royal Scot train we board. Don't be late."

Chapter 4

Mary raced up the old stairs at Union Street. She had done this many times before to catch a local train, but never to take a train to London. Even though she was in plenty of time, she wanted to make sure that she found the right platform. Jack's instructions were that he would be standing by the news-stand, just by platform two.

At the top of the stairs, she noticed the familiar clock over to the left of the station. She read the time on it: 7:20. Mary knew the train was scheduled to leave at half-past seven from platform two. She paused at that moment to collect her thoughts. Everyone around her seemed to be in a rush. It was at times like this, Mary thought of Celia and some of the girls at the factory. Instead of proceeding, she closed her eyes and said a little prayer. Then she calmly walked forward towards the platform.

The first thing she noticed was the sign Royal Scot, arched over the barrier. It looked quite dirty. No wonder she had never noticed it before. Just then a rail-worker stopped in front of her, and directed an old lady over to a seat nearby. The left-hand corner of the station looked very important. This was where all the activity was going on this morning. Travellers leaving for London, and loved ones seeing them off. She could hear a vendor, somewhere inside the station, shouting in a coarse Glasgow accent: 'Morning papers! Cigarettes, chocolates.'

Under the hanging sign: Platform 1 And 2, two railwaymen stood ready to check the passengers' tickets, before allowing them onto the platform. Porters stood nearby with wheelbarrows; everyone seemed important in some way or other. The long London train was standing at platform two, and people were now getting ready to board it.

The were many soldiers inside the station this morning. Goodness knows where they were going to. Many looked over at her, as she walked forward. Mary was smartly dressed in her new light coloured two-piece suit, striped blouse, and newly bought broach. In a ladylike fashion, she carried her raincoat over her travelling bag.

Mary could not help but notice how young the soldiers looked. Most of them she thought were Americans. One cheeky lad winked at her, while another whistled. As she wondered where they were going to, she looked away from them. Something big was underway; she knew that much. Heaven help them.

Some people who had time to kill were sitting over to the left, in front of the Buffet and Waiting Room, chatting and smoking. She never realised how busy the station was so early in the morning. Who were all these people in transit? There were also many every day travellers criss-crossing the station, no doubt going into work or heading home to the suburbs.

In the crowd, she spotted Jack's white hair; he was standing reading the London Times. He was over by the outlet, under the clock, that sold the papers, sweets and magazines. Even though the station was busy, she could see that his trained eye had spotted her. There was a long queue snaking out from the platform onto the concourse. Mary looked at the faces of her fellow travellers standing in line. There were many young couples there, as well as elderly men and women, soldiers and men in long coats, hats and scarves.

Jack came forward to meet her. Mary was learning fast. She noticed that he looked at a man in a charcoal gabardine coat, wearing a soft green hat, standing against the wall, next to the Waiting Room, as if to tell him something. She could not make out the man's face. The man immediately walked through the crowd to the front of the queue. It was very strange indeed; for the guard let him onto the platform, as if prearranged. Mary wondered to herself: "Why did he let him through the gate, and not anyone else?"

"Mary, you are in good time, "Jack handed her a First Class ticket, and a small brown envelope: "You will find inside your expenses for the trip."

Mary quickly put the brown envelope in her coat pocket, beside the other one for Mr Wallander, smiled and asked the obvious question: "Do we join the queue?"

Jack looked at the ticket inspector at the gate, and signalled to him with a nod of the head that they were on their way. "No, we can board the train right away," and they both walked up to the front of the queue.

Mary had never been to London before, and here she was going First Class. Not only that, she was being treated like royalty, escorted right up to the front of the queue. It was going to be a long journey; she knew that. Mary brought along with her two magazines to read, and also a pen and paper for writing down recipes that she wanted to try out.

Jack without hesitation took Mary to the front of the queue, and from there they were ushered onto the platform by a conscientious guard. As they walked along the platform to their carriage, Jack seemed happy. He smiled at some of the people hanging out of the maroon carriages. There was great excitement all around them. Jack was not immune from it. The excitement in his voice was understood when he spoke to her: "This is the greatest invention of the century."

Mary wondered what he was talking about. "Yes, it is," and she smiled as if to agree.

"They say the Royal Scot is a record breaker; it can go at over 100 miles an hour."

Mary did not like speed. She had only been in one car so far in her life. She was taken out by her mother's friend Andy, one Sunday afternoon, along with her mother. She did not like the way it was driven. She preferred the tram. That day, she was glad when they all got back home safely.

The best way to travel for her was by boat. More than anything, Mary loved the sea. The sea seemed to set her free. She could not understand it. Her thoughts just glided away as if into the water, as the fresh air on her face revived her. She always felt alive in a boat; it was as if sailing brought back her childhood memories to her. The expanse of space, and the tranquil nature of the water most definitely settled her, as it transported her to her destination.

However, she was not at all sure of this mode of transport: a train that went at over 100 miles an hour. The thought of material travelling through time at such a speed unnerved her, and the thought of going to the toilet as it thundered along was a worry too.

The carriage doors were beginning to slam shut. When they arrived at the First Class section, Mary thought she had better take part in this wonderful experience. To get off on the right foot, so to speak, she asked him: "How long will it take?"

Jack had all the details ready at hand. As he opened the carriage door, he answered: "Seven hours and twenty minutes."

So, they would be there in the afternoon. That did not seem too bad. Mary would be able to doze off, and be in good fettle to see the shops when they arrived.

The passengers in First Class were strange. She noticed this right away, as they came in and walked along the corridor, looking for their seats. As she passed, looking in at the compartments, she could see people in threes and fours grouped together. They were rich. Mary could tell that, not only by the way they dressed, but by the way they interacted with each other. More than anything else, the lack of spontaneity as they sat together identified their class status.

When she got into her carriage, right away Mary put her coat above the rack, and then sat by the window. She kept her bag by her side. Mary fixed the little tied curtain; for it was twisted. It was like being in a small drawing room. Jack took off his overcoat and threw it above the left hand luggage rack. Then he sat down opposite her. As soon as he was seated, he took out his morning paper and started to read it again.

"We will be off any minute," he said looking over the broadsheet.

It was obvious to Mary that he was eager to meet with someone. But who? Jack kept looking round towards the door, as if someone was about to come in.

The wonderful sound of the guard's whistle was followed by an enormous combustion, then movement. As soon as the train left the station, he turned and said to her: "Excuse me. I will be back in a minute," and was gone.

Mary did not mind this at all, and as the Second City of the empire disappeared behind her, she got out her magazine and started to read it. About half an hour later, Jack appeared. As soon as he cane back into the carriage, he told Mary: "I met a friend on the train. You will meet him at lunch."

Dinner was served at eleven thirty, so they went along to get a table early. She noticed that they had a table booked for them. Just as the waiter was showing them where to go, a man with a beard and glasses appeared in the restaurant car.

Jack as soon as he spotted the man in the summer suit greeted him warmly. Then he turned and said: "Ivan, this is Mary. She is delivering a letter for us to Mr Wallenberg in London.

"Ah, the girl with the tartan scarf," he said in a charming foreign accent.

Mary looked up from reading the reserved nameplate on the restaurant table. What did he mean by that? She could see by the way he was dressed he was not British, but was someone who aped the ways of the upper class. He was bald, suntanned and foreign looking. The other thing she detected was that he was a playboy, a drunkard - someone who loved to show off in private.

"Ivan will be having lunch with us."

The waiter dressed in a white jacket and black trousers looked at Mary. It was obvious to him that she was not the usual type to be with older men in First Class of the Royal Scot. He waited for the guests to take their seats, before taking their order.

When he was seated, Mary looked at Ivan again. Men like this were always going in and out of the Central Hotel in Glasgow. She had never met any of them, but she knew their type. She made an attempt to shake his hand across the table, but the train swayed, as she did this, and she soon found herself letting go of it. It was then she noticed the mysterious man sitting behind him was the man in the gaberdine coat and hat. Still she could not see his face.

"Ivan is working on a project for us at the moment. He is very much part of our team."

"Yes, I am delighted to be back in Britain," the man answered in perfect English, with this time only a slight trace of a foreign accent.

As he sat there at the window opposite her, Mary could see he was a heavy smoker: for his fingers were stained with tobacco. The two usually she had noticed went together: drink and cigarettes.

The waiter was very efficient and soon scribbled down what the lady and man next to her wanted: "Would you like to order now sir?" he asked looking at Ivan.

Seeing that Jack and Mary had already ordered, Ivan skipped the soup and went straight for the next course.

To keep the conversation going, Jack said with his usual authority: "Mary works in Twomax clothing company in Glasgow. She is a machinist."

Knowing that it was lunchtime there too, Mary thought of the girls sitting on the gravestones, and she smiled to herself. She had so far got through the first test: ordering a meal, now she had to eat it in front of strangers. All things considered, she was feeling confident.

As the high-speed train raced towards London, Ivan cracked a joke: "I hope there is a barber shop on the train, Jack?"

Jack put his spoon in the middle of the bowl and before scooping up some more lentil soup into his mouth, he laughed and said: "I believe there is one on the Flying Scotsman. I read something about that in the Times last month. Not sure if the Royal Scot has one, though."

After Jack took his white cloth napkin from the table, and wiped his mouth, he kept the conversation going by saying: "How is business at the moment, Ivan?

Ivan obviously thought it best before answering to update everyone at the table about his standing in the world: "I have companies in Lisbon and in Madrid and also Trieste," after this he sighed, smiled and said: "Yes, things are difficult at the moment, but one gets by."

Mary had not heard of the last city, but she smiled again, as if she understood what lay behind the facade of an international businessman.

Jack looked round at the waiter still standing close by their table. "This war has been good to some," he joked.

On hearing this Ivan roared with laughter. No one in the carriage turned round; for they were all too busy eating. Everyone heard him though.

The menu was quite varied. Ivan ordered a bottle of red wine. Mary was unsure what to order for sweet. Jack could see this. He turned to Ivan beside him, and started talking to him about things that she did not understand. Mary hid behind the menu and listened to them. She finally went for ice cream and fruit.

After they had finished eating, they sat in the dining car chatting. Mary did not say much, she enjoyed listening to the rhythm of the train. The staccato beat, along with the sway of the carriage, and the odd whoosh, seemed to calm her. As she looked at the other faces in the restaurant car, it seemed to her that they were all part of a never-ending voyage on their way to goodness knows where.

Seven hours on a train was longer than it sounded. Mary did not say all that much. The two men chatted nonstop about the war, and sometimes what they would do after it. They would only break off when one got up to go to the toilet. or when the waiter was called to refill their glasses.

Chapter 5

They arrived on time at Victoria station. Mary thought the capital a fascinating place. She had seen photos of people sleeping there in the underground station at night. She knew that they even slept on the tracks. Sandbags were everywhere. Today there seemed to be a lot of people on the go within the station. Maybe it was always like that. London seemed so different from anything she had seen so far in life.

Naturally, the streets around the station were busy too with travellers, soldiers and shoppers. The soldiers were just like the ones she had seen in Glasgow; they were Americans or Canadians or something like that. The Londoners were out in force too. She noticed they did not say much to each other; they had been through a lot. They seemed extraordinary, ready for anything that Hitler could throw at them. They gave the impression that they would still carry on no matter what. As she walked through the station with Jack and Ivan, she listened to the rhythmic cockney slang of their voices.

"All right, my luv. You will catch your death, going about like that, you know."

Street vendors were shouting just like they did in Glasgow. Shops were busy with shoppers too. Women were hurrying home to feed their families. She also noticed queer types that were on their own, hanging around the station; loners you would not engage with anywhere in the world. It may only have been a few minutes they had been in the station, but it left an impression on her. This was an international stop off, there was no doubt about that. She had never come across that feeling before:

one of isolation within a crowded area. Outside Victoria Station, they walked towards a cab, parked at the rank.

"Right, where you going governor?" was how the cabbie put it, as he held the door open for Mary.

"St Landelin's Hotel, Westminster," Jack told him, as he signalled for Ivan to go before him, inside the cab.

It was at that moment it hit Mary that neither the two men had any luggage with them. This seemed very odd indeed. Would the two men be sharing a room together? Would they be meeting lady friends at the hotel? Who would look after their clothes? They would need clean shirts, underwear, socks, shaving equipment in the morning. Maybe they were queer? She had heard of people like that, but had never got to know any of them.

As they moved off, Mary looked out of the London cab. As the light faded, she watched more shadowy figures move here and there. Those figures seemed to be everywhere and, for some reason, summed up where she was. Thankfully, she did not have to wait long until a more definite picture came into view. When they turned the corner, she caught sight of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. She knew them all right from school, and pictures in women's magazines.

Ivan seemed to be happy smoking his cigarette and relaxing. Jack noticed her looking out of the window, and he took the opportunity to show off: "I believe, the first palace was built here in the eleventh century. Thereafter, Kings and Queens of England stayed here until the great fire in 1512. It has been the parliament and courts of justice ever since."

Ivan nodded as if to confirm this, then he looked out at the great sight: "Very impressive, I must say."

The cab suddenly stopped, and the gruff voice of the cabbie once more shouted out loud: "St Landelin's Hotel!" then he turned and smiled: "You will all have to walk up to the reception - you can see the road is blocked off."

Mary sitting by the window looked out. It seemed like a cul-de-sac to her. The light was fading fast now, but the building at the end still looked grand, if indeed that was where the hotel was. She could see no sign with any hotel's name on it though and this worried her.

In fact, it became apparent that this street was the entrance into the hotel. The whole building whatever it was, was situated in a U shape. Jack obviously knew where to go. He walked in a confident manner up to the street to where there was the sign that said St Landelin's Hotel. There a soldier stood on duty. Ivan seemed at home here too. It was hard to read

his thoughts though. The first-class hotel had six floors. From the outside, it looked not so much posh, but mysterious. A man in a top hat and a dark coat was waiting for them. Mary kept calm; she would just follow them, get to bed early, and in the morning do as she was told: deliver the letter to Mr Wallenberg. Hopefully, that would be that. She really wanted to see the shops.

The man in the top hat signalled to a young porter to come forward. He came out immediately from behind the door on his right hand side. The lad had no expression on his face. He looked at the young lady, smiled, and gave a little bow to her. Mary thought he looked foreign. He took her bag from her. As she stood there outside the hotel, Mary was overcome with the serious nature of the surroundings.

The doorman seemed to sense this. In a husky English voice, the elderly man in the top hat ushered her forward: "Please go inside,"

As soon as she went inside and saw the grand entrance, the furnishings, and balcony above, Mary's spirits soon picked up: "So this is how the rich are treated," and she laughed to herself: "If only the girls at Twomax could see me now."

The hotel was busy. People were standing around talking to each other. It was plain to see alcohol was not rationed here. Men with red faces, who had too much to drink, were sitting across from each other. The small tables they sat at were crowded with glasses. Their voices accentuated, sharp and cutting.

In a pompous voice someone said: "I will see if I can get a message to him, though I am not sure if Cedric is batting for us at the moment," and they both laughed.

Just before Jack signed them all in, Ivan asked him: "Is it true there is a tunnel running from here to the Houses of Parliament?"

Jack did not look up. He continued to sign his name in the register. The receptionist - a handsome man who could easily have been in the movies - did not react either. Presently, he handed two keys to Jack, turned and looked at Mary. When everything was in order, he smiled and said in a charming tone: "I hope you have a pleasant stay, madam."

Mary appreciated his greeting, but could not help but look away from him. After Jack put the receipt in a large brown wallet, he handed Mary her key. There were no other formalities; Mary could see that everything had been taken care of. Everyone was quite tired and wanted to get to their room. She would try to get a cup of tea, and then get a rest, before off to bed for an early night. Even though it was only half past seven the day seemed over. She imagined the men would no doubt be going to the bar in

the hotel, or some pub close by. When they had pulled up, she noticed The Prince of Wales pub across the road. It looked quite nice - not like the sawdust pits in Glasgow. She would not mind going there if they sold hot food.

Strangely enough when they were climbing the stairs to their respective rooms on the first floor, Jack suggested this: "Why not after we freshen up, head across the road to the Prince of Wales pub for an evening drink."

Ivan who was behind Jack, whooped: "Oh, we can't take the girl with the tartan scarf there."

"Why not?"

"Dick Turpin lives just around the corner."

"I will show you to your room," said the young porter laughing, still holding her travelling bag.

Mary did not notice him behind her. She was pleased to see him when he came into view. It was the same young lad that had taken her bag outside the hotel. Mary's room was the first door on the landing: number 22.

Jack stopped, and looked at the porter. The young lad immediately acted; he took the key from Mary and opened the door for her. He said in a caring tone: "If you need anything, just let me know, and I will get it for you." he smiled at her, and ushered her inside: "Madam."

Jack, before the porter went inside, pressed a coin into his hand, and then gave him some instructions: "Please help the lady; we will see ourselves into our rooms."

"Very good, sir. "

Inside the room, Mary was like a fish out of water. She wondered if she should tip him too. She could see that he was just an ordinary lad, not long out of school.

He put her travelling bag by the dressing table, moved the water bowl and jug slightly nearer to the wall onto the table there. Then he turned and gave her a wonderful boyish smile "You will like it here madam," he said in broken English. "It is very nice."

She had not noticed how innocent looking he was, until that moment. Mary could see he was just an ordinary lad. She was glad to see his face come alive as he looked at her. As if it were the right thing to do, she sat on the bed and looked at the portrait of the king on the wall: "Where are you from?"

"Greece madam. My father brought the family here before the war."

Mary had never met anyone from Greece before. It seemed a strange country. The thing that impressed her most of all was the way he could move between two worlds: the secret world of the rich, and the ordinary world where he came from. The two did not mix though, they only came together through employment. Somehow he had learned all of this. He knew how to be anonymous and natural at the same time. The porter seemed to reassure her about her new surroundings.

After opening the door to the toilet, the porter switched on the light by the bed. The central light lit up the whole room. When she saw how clean and colourful the room was, Mary thought she had entered Buckingham Palace. It was beyond her dreams. It wasn't opulent, but it was regal. This was what hit her. She forgot all about Jack and Ivan, and just for a moment she thought she was here on her own. Yes, that was it, she was on holiday, and tomorrow the young Greek lad could take her into London for a coffee and show her the sights.

The young porter seemed to understand his client. He stood with a smile on his face, as he waited for instructions: "Should I bring you some tea, and something to eat, madam?

Mary wasn't sure what to order. She wasn't sure of all this madam business either. She asked his name.

"Dimitri, madam," he said, as if teasing her.

Mary too was learning fast, how to overcome ignorance: "Dimitri, please could you do that. I will leave it up to you what you bring."

"Very good, madam" he said and hurried away.

All alone, Mary sat on the corner of the bed, and just stared at everything around her. There were some expensive antiques in her room on the table and by the side of the bed. She would have to watch she did not break anything. So far, she had not betrayed her class. Mary hoped that being honest would get her through the next few days.

She lay down and pressed her face against the soft white pillow. It was good to rest. As if in a dream, she saw her friends hard at work at the factory. She wanted to invite them to come round to the hotel for tea, after they had finished their shift. Mary was not sure how long she had been dreaming when there was a knock on the door, and in came the young lad, Dimitri the porter. He was carrying a tray of hot food. It looked grand; she would eat tonight. Mary would not be going to bed hungry - that was for sure.

Chapter 6

Mary woke up when the alarm went off. She remembered what Dimitri had said to her before leaving her room last night: "Breakfast will be served at 6.30am. You are to join your friends at eight."

The young lad seemed to understand her. He was the only one after all she had met so far who was real. Everyone else was false, as if playing out a character in a movie, or a part in a play.

Outside her room, she noticed a chambermaid on the first floor. She was around her age, so Mary was familiar with her: "Excuse me, do you know where breakfast is served?'

The chambermaid was carrying out bed sheets from the room next door number 23. There were a lot of sheets lying in a container outside the door. Mary wondered if the sheets had to be cleaned every day.

The young lady looked round at her, and in a lovely cockney accent said: "Good morning, luv."

"Where do I go for breakfast?

"Down the stairs, and it is on the left. You can't miss it, dear."

Trying to understand her life from her accent, Mary smiled at her. To be friendly, she was going to ask her where Dimitri was this morning, but she thought she had better not, just in case he was somewhere he shouldn't be. Anyway, she knew she should stay in character. Even though it was a strange part she was playing: a messenger for the War Office. Feeling fine after a good night's rest, Mary walked down the stairs, and into the dining room. As soon as she got there, she stopped. It was very posh indeed. Mary was not sure if she should sit at an empty table, or speak to someone first.

Suddenly, a hand went up. She saw someone waving at her. "It's Ivan the Terrible," she joked to herself.

Mary walked to his table. Jack had his back to her, but he quickly wiped his mouth with a white napkin. Presently, he stood up and turned round to greet her. "Good morning, Mary. I hope you slept well," he said brimming with life.

On the other hand, Ivan she could see looked tired, but happy. There was no smoking in the restaurant, and after complaining about this to Jack, he excused himself. "Excuse me, I am going to pop out and have a cigarette. If the waitress comes, will you please order me another black coffee."

Mary had heard that men took black coffee to sober them up, after drinking all night. Ivan certainly drank a lot; you could see that by just looking at him.

The dining area was quite quiet. It was early, no doubt lots of people were still in bed. It was difficult to understand how big the hotel was; it went all the way down to the street on both sides. This morning just one waitress stood by to attend to the wishes of the guests. Mary had a full breakfast. It was really more like a meal to her. She had porridge, beacon and eggs, toast and tea - lots of tea.

There wasn't much said across the table. It was as if they knew they were all strangers thrown together to serve their country. Mary was resigned to what lay in store for her. She watched people coming and going inside the restaurant. Ordinary faces, only one or two happy with their lot. She loved watching people, trying to imagine something about their lives. It was great fun.

Not long after Ivan came back into the restaurant, Jack put down the morning paper. When Ivan was seated, Jack turned to her and said reverently: "Mary, today, is the day you have to meet Mr Wallenberg. I want you to give him this," and he pushed a white envelope across the table to her. I will take the other one back."

Mary looked at it, turned it over, picked up her shoulder bag, that she had put over her chair, and put it on her lap. Calmly, she placed the unmarked white envelope inside her bag, took the other one out, then clipped it shut.

"You have to meet Mr Wallenberg inside the National Gallery, just off Trafalgar square, at 1 pm.

She was starting to think it all a bit of a laugh. Mary looked up at him and smiled, and just said: "Fine."

"You will enter the gallery and make your way to *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly*, by Thomas Gainsborough. It is situated on the ground floor. There you will be contacted by a Mr Wallenberg."

As she looked at the photo of the painting, she asked discreetly: "How will he know me?"

Ivan smiled at her, then he gave a little nod to Jack: "Good question."

There was an empty chair beside Jack. Ivan, as if rehearsed, from it lifted a small parcel, wrapped in thin brown paper. It was obvious that whatever was inside was delicate and precious: for he balanced it between two large thickset hands. Then when he was ready, with a charming smile, he offered it to Mary across the table.

"He will know you by this: the girl with the tartan scarf."

She had wondered why they had called her this; now she knew.

Mary looked at the scarf. She knew that it was not only Highlanders and Borderers who wore tartan. Many people in industry wore the Scottish national dress too. The scarf was soft; it looked good quality. She read the label on it: R W Forsyth. The shop she knew was in Gordon Street, Glasgow.

Ivan noted the reaction. He seemed to know all about this present: "It is Black Watch, I think. Is that right, Jack?"

"Yes, that is correct, Ivan. You know your tartans."

"I know the other national product better," he laughed and nodded to himself.

Mary, like all young ladies, loved presents. She smiled right away and put it around her neck. Immediately, she felt the quality of the product on her skin. It was expensive; she knew that much. She then folded the scarf, and placed it over her lap.

Jack gave her some final instructions: "Take the tube to Trafalgar Square, and walk over to the National Gallery. There in front of the picture the *Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly*, give the envelope to Mr Wallenberg."

"How will I know who he is?" asked Mary.

Ivan looked at Jack, but he did not say anything.

Jack put his hand over his chin. Then he rubbed his face, the way men do, as if checking he had shaved. You will ask him: "How is Stockholm, these days? The answer you want to hear is: cold and expensive."

Mary went along to the tube station. After buying a ticket at the kiosk, she soon found the platform downstairs. It was only a couple of

stops. After coming out of the station, she asked the round faced news vendor in the check bunnet: "I am looking for the National Gallery."

The old man stared at her and, before shouting the headline of the paper again, he pointed to a large building across the square. She looked up at Nelson, then down at one of the lions, smiled and walked on.

Inside the gallery, she managed to find the picture where she had to meet Mr Wallenberg. There were not many on show. In her imagination, she saw him as tall, blond, ageing and rich.

Mary really studied the picture. She was not sure what to make of it at first; this was unusual for she normally made her mind up pretty quickly about pictures and paintings. She had very few gray areas in life. Mary either liked something or not. Anyway, there was not much else to do, but to look at it. The gallery was not that busy. One or two people on their lunch break. An old man in a long great coat, along with two elderly women, who looked like sisters, kept passing by in front of her, but they did not distract her.

She followed the line of vision of the little girls, and of course this led to the butterfly. There was something about the restraint of the elder sister that she liked. It was the way she held her younger sister's hand. The young sister looked as if she would chase after the butterfly till she got lost. The picture in front of her did not only draw her to the countryside, where butterflies and young girls exist, it did something else: it reminded her of someone. Who was it? In her imagination, she saw a man living in the country with his mother, father and brother. When she returned she would marry him. There and then she made up her mind; they would stay with his parents until they got a house of their own.

This lovely image in front of her though came from a place she did not know. However, it seemed to fit in with the expectation of where she was going in life. The painting offered up the possibility of escape and romance - that was why she liked it. As she looked at it, she had to admit to herself that even in Scotland, she had not really been much to the countryside.

Mary loved the seaside. She loved to look at the sea. She loved being near the sea. The west coast of Scotland had some lovely coastal resorts. Ever since young, she went there; first with her mother, then with her pals. She often thought about rowing boats, paddle steamers, ferries going from pier to shore, children playing on the beach. The sky over the sea was always blue in her imagination; the water always calm. Her childhood memories would never die; for every day they lived in her imagination in an endless summer of hope and love.

She often wondered how it was possible for her soul to be free from the world, even when it was travelling through it. In fact, she often thought about the time when she took her younger sister Lucy out on a rowing boat. The man asked her before they got in if she could row. Mary responded, and reassured him that she could, even though she had never been in a rowing boat in her life before. It was great fun until a ship appeared in the distance. The man who had asked her the question, standing on the beach, started waving at her, telling her to come back at once to the shore. He was mad with her. She never forgot that day. It had been a terrific adventure. Thankfully, somehow that day she learned how to row, and they got back to the shore safely. The journey would continue.

Yes, the painting in front of her was lovely. This was life: for you could be pulled away by illusions, like the younger sister. But then again, you could enjoy the illusions, then come back to where you were, knowing more about this life after chasing butterflies. She thought it would be nice to live near such a place. She wondered where the girls were from. Who was their father? Was he the painter? Could one of the daughters be called Mary? These interesting questions from the canvas led her back to her own childhood, and soon she started to sing to herself her favourite song again:

Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high. There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby...

"You looking for company, dear?"

Mary looked away from the painting. He looked as if he needed someone to talk to. She could see he was a young tramp. Mary was not the type to entertain such men.

"Let's go for a drink," he said in a sing-song voice.

"If this is Wallenberg, he had better come up with the line soon, or I will be off."

Just to be sure she asked him: "Where you from?"

"Whitechapel - ever been there?"

Just then a janitor - well that is what he looked like - came over and rescued her,

"Don't be annoying the ladies, Ted, not in here - not the place for it my son. Be a good fellow, on you go now."

The young tramp who had sat down beside her got to his feet slowly. Presently, he grunted: "You can't get away with nothing these days."

After this incident, she reckoned she must have been in front of the picture for about twenty minutes. She got fed up. No one came near her.

The girl with the tartan scarf walked up to the painting, then away from it, but still no one came. She waited a full hour inside the gallery. However, when the clock went to 2pm, she thought she had better go back to the hotel, and tell Jack and Ivan - no sign of Mr Wallenberg.

Chapter 7

When Mary came out of the gallery, she looked at the family under the portico: they were having a picnic. Then she walked to the middle of the square, and read the poster on Nelson's column: *Save your way to Victory*. There were many surface air raid shelters in the square. She did not linger; she walked on. It was obvious that there had been trouble at the corner, outside the bank. It looked as if someone had been knocked down. A crowd had gathered. There was someone lying there. She noticed the figure, though she could not tell if it was a man or woman. Whoever it was had been wearing a Scottish scarf, Royal Stewart tartan. Mary looked over at the crowd, then she walked on again.

Mary loved going for tea - any excuse would do. She spotted a tearoom at the corner, and over she went and inside. It was busy; for this was the lunch hour for all the offices in the city. She stood in-line, took a cup, and when her turned came paid for her tea. It was good luck; she turned and spotted a table by the window. There was a couple sitting there at the window, but the seat next to them was free. He was dressed in a long herringbone coat, and she was wrapped up in an expensive fur coat. Mary smiled at them, but they never noticed her; for they were too busy talking.

"I wonder who she was?" asked the woman.

"Did you not get a good look at her?"

"Not really. She may have been Scottish though; she had a tartan scarf on."

"That doesn't mean she was Scottish."

"No, I suppose not. But she looked British."

"Could have been a Piccadilly Commando, shot down in her prime?

"Walter!"

Just then another man joined them. He had some more information: "They say she was shot at close range - didn't stand a chance, poor thing."

Everything went quiet around Mary; all the voices in the cafe seemed to fade away. She never even heard the familiar sound of the cup connecting with the saucer, as she put it down. Mary looked at her scarf around her neck. She suddenly realised: "The girl with a bright tartan scarf has been murdered. The scarf they bought me is dark tartan. That bullet was meant for me. The assassin got the wrong person."

She seemed to be in a dream for a time, and sat there until an elderly woman collecting teacups came over and spoke to her.

"You all right, luv?

"Yes, fine thanks."

It was only then that Mary heard someone whistling a song she knew. She could not see who was whistling it though. The lyrics came to her right away: *For a while we must part but remember me sweetheart Till the lights of London shine again.* The song was played by Joss Loss. Mary knew the song from going to the dancing in Glasgow. She got up and made her way back to the hotel in Westminster. The tube came right away, and as she walked up the little street to the entrance of the hotel, she felt better, but still in a bit of a trance. The song *Till the lights of London shine again*, sang in her head; it seemed to want to keep her company through the trauma. She was thankful for whoever it was that had whistled the tune in the tea room. It seemed to bring her back to a friendly war torn city.

There was a different man on the desk now. He was bald, and looked not unlike the director Alfred Hitchcock. No one else was around; all the chairs were empty around the foyer area.

Mary asked him politely. "Can I have the room key, 22 please?"

The bald man immediately turned round to look for it. He seemed to be annoyed: for he was listening to the radio. Mary thought: "He must like the Harry Roy tune: *They Can't Black out the Moon*."

She could see her key dangling there. At this time of day, most of the pigeon holes had keys in them. It looked as if everyone was out in town or at work. She also saw a note lying there.

Instead of handing her the key, the man turned and said to her: "Madam, the gentlemen booked out this morning; they said you would not be coming back."

Mary went white: "Well, I am here."

The fat man at reception had a dry sense of humour. He looked over his glasses, sighed, and said: "Yes, I can see that - you are very much here."

Mary was starting to understand; they had set her up. They may not even be British. What should she do now?

"Do you know the men who brought me here?"

"Never seen them before, madam"

"Have they ever stayed here?"

"No, never."

"Did they pay the bill?

"I think, I had better get the manager."

A few moments later, a tall debonair man, in a pinstripe suit appeared. His colleague no doubt had briefed him behind the scenes about what had happened. He looked as if he wanted to be elsewhere. However, he stepped out into the reception area to meet Mary with a smile. His reticent tone gave away his inner feelings though: "I am sorry to hear your friends have left you here all alone. I have made some enquiries; they have not stayed here before. I am afraid nobody knows them. You must understand people from many countries come here, all year round. Of course, if there are any irregularities, we pass the information on to the relevant authorities. In this instance, the men only stayed the one night. They paid their bill this morning, and I believe around lunchtime they left the hotel, leaving no forwarding address."

Mary had never come across a man like this before. He was attractive, educated and uncaring. She could see he was ready to walk away, and turn his back on her. This of course he did. Mary had enough money in her purse to get home. She remembered Jack gave her expenses. She decided that she would head back to Victoria station, and try to get a train home to Scotland.

The first thing she had to do was get rid of the tartan scarf the men gave her in the hotel. She did this by leaving it on the reception counter. Whoever killed the girl outside the gallery would soon find out he had attacked the wrong person, and be on her trail again.

Round the corner, outside the pub, she bumped into Dimitri. He beamed at her: "Are you leaving today, madam?"

Mary was pleased to see him. "I need to talk to you," and almost pulled him into the Prince of Wales pub. "These English pubs are great; you can get food and tea in them," she said, as she opened the door.

Dimitri was in no hurry: for he was still on his lunch. He had never been in a pub before, and was not sure how he should act.

Mary ordered tea, and when seated at the window she asked him: "What do you know about the two men whom I arrived with."

At first, he was shy. He did not say much. As they sat together, the young lad just smiled as if he had done something wrong. He soon opened up: "They have been before. The tall man with the white hair is Scottish; the other man is from Eastern Europe." He said laughing: "They say the foreign man is working for the Germans."

This was no laughing matter to Mary, and she kept quiet, and invited him to continue talking.

"They were here about a year ago. The man working for the Germans used to bring ladies round. Then they would leave and go somewhere. I have seen many things in the hotel, but would rather not say to you what goes on."

"Do you know where they went to?"

"No, they just checked out at lunchtime today. I looked for you."

"Did you hear them say anything about me?"

Dimitri smiled like a child: "The Scottish man laughed when the foreign man said: "Will we see the girl with the tartan scarf again?"

Dimitri seemed to understand what they were up to, and out of the blue he said to her: "Why not stay at the flat around the corner in Broadway. I have the key here on me. You can live there on your own until the weekend. That's when the manager's mother comes back from America; she likes to live there."

Mary thought about the offer, and decided to take him up on it. She would lie low until the end of the week, then travel back to Scotland. The letter in her bag was dated for the 6 June 1944. Something big was going to happen. That was only a few days away. Surely, the envelope she was carrying would be of no use to anyone after that date.

Dimitri loved the excitement and finished his tea quickly: "It is just around the corner. Come on, I will show you."

The apartment was situated on the second floor. It was small, tidy, and clean. There was even a phone in it. It just looked like another hotel room. Mary wondered what it must be like to have a phone at home. She would not use it though. In any case, no one she knew had a phone. Just as she was thinking this, Dimitri said to her: "Don't use the phone, only in emergency call the hotel, and leave a message at reception for me.

"What if it rings?'

"Just leave it."

"I will be back in the morning."

Mary heard the door shut. She stood by the window and looked down onto the street. She waited for Dimitri to come out of the flat below. It was a queer business - was it not. She reassured herself: "I will be glad when I am back home and this is all over."

It was an interesting area she was in. She watched some women in raincoats and headscarfs walk by towards the tube station. Many allied soldiers passed by too. She could only guess what country they were from. Yes, the flat was small, clean and Spartan. She turned on the radio and was pleased to hear: *Life with the Lions*. She knew the programme; she had heard it at home many times. Somehow it seemed different now though. Mary boiled some water on the gas stove, and made herself a cup of tea. She did not mind having no milk. She was just glad of the tea she found in the cupboard.

Later on, she went back over to the window. The curtains were dark. Someone had made shutters for night-time, no doubt to blackout the light. At the corner of the street, she saw something move; a leg came out of the doorway to put out a cigarette butt. Something told her to keep looking. This time she saw the man in a gabardine coat, with the soft green hat. Just then, he looked up at her window. Mary ducked behind the curtain. However, this time she got a quick look at his face. Where had she seen him before? She sat down by the comfortable chair by the fireplace.

"I remember who it is; it's that man who was on the train, sitting in front of me in the dining car."

Thoughts ran around her head like crazy, offering questions and answers immediately after asking them. She could not quite understand who was who anymore. Anyone involved in espionage must live on the edge, they could fall into the hands of the other side at anytime. Mary was now in this strange mysterious world.

She looked at her bag by the bed, that she brought with her; it was time for her to find out what was going on. She went over and took out the white envelope from it. Someone was after the information inside it. Mary knew that much. After some thought, she opened the white envelope to find out what it said. She had refrained from doing this thus far. *Please note we will be going for a holiday to the beach, this year. We will not be taking the ferry.*

"What did it all mean?"

She stood up and walked to the window again, and there she slowly drew back the dark curtain. Her shadow was not at his post. Where was he? Suddenly, she caught sight of him again; he was in the phone box at the corner making a call. What should she do? They were onto her. She

wanted to go out and see London, and forget all about what had brought her here.

Mary had a good sense of humour: "Maybe I will meet Mr Wallenberg."

Chapter 8

Mary that afternoon took a tube to Leicester Square. Although alone, she moved confidently by the makeshift underground bomb shelters. Britain at War had a uniform feeling to it. However, it was the faces in the capital that really impressed her. The resilience of the people. She could see it in the old women's faces, as well as the old men who were too old to fight. They would get through whatever Hitler threw at them.

She bought a ticket at the barrier, and smiled at the railway man waiting to open the gate to let her go down for the tube. Just before she turned to go, she noticed in the mirror that hung in the ticket office, her shadow, the strange man in the gabardine coat and soft green hat. He seemed to know that inside her bag was a message addressed to Mr Wallenberg. She held her shoulder bag close to her, and walked down for the tube.

The tube arrived, and a small group got on and off. Mary walked towards the driver so that he could see her. She was not sure if she should chase the shadow away or tell someone. Her shadow she noticed got into the second carriage. She had heard of Leicester Square, and that is where she planned to alight the train.

Mary decided to throw him off. After coming out of the station she walked around the square a few times, and when she saw the sign for the National Gallery at Trafalgar Square, she walked on. She walked on until she came across the same tearoom, as she had been in before. It was just as busy as the last time. People were sitting about chatting. She could not get away from the diverse nature of London. The cockney voices chatting away quite the thing around her, as if unaffected by not only the war, but

the foreigners in the capital. "They must get used to people coming and going through their city," she thought to herself.

Even though it had been bombed many times, London seemed as if it were still the centre of the universe. Vera Lynn's song was playing on a radio nearby: *We'll meet again don't know where don't know when*. This was followed by George Formbey, *Leaning on the lamppost*.

The shadow must have been well trained: for he got there before her. He was sitting just inside the door. She of course saw him when she went inside. The shadow now was not in anyway hiding from her. She bought a cup of tea and a scone and jam. Mary sat at the same seat as before, and looked out of the window. She was getting tired of it all. She would go to the station and buy a ticket and go back up the road. It was still an eventful story to tell the girls at Twomacks. Anyway, she would be pleased to see them, and she knew they would be pleased to see her. They had certainly given her enough money to get home - whoever they were. Mary had sown a pocket in her underwear. She trusted no one when she was on her own. From events near and far, it was obvious to her that the world was a dangerous place.

London during the war looked so monochrome and war-torn. "What must it have been like in peace time?" She could not tell. "The people seem to lead interesting lives though," she thought as she watched them go past Trafalgar square. "People torn apart by war, making the best of it, I guess. Everybody wondering about a loved one. Counting the days till they will meet again. How long will it be until the lights of London shine again?"

Just then, the shadow approached her. She could see that he had a rough pockmarked face. She could not tell the colour of his hair, for he kept his trilby on. Most men took their hats of inside, but he was different. He sat down beside her and smiled. Men who did not dance much at the Plaza in Glasgow, smiled like this, when they came forward to chat with the girls. They were not the kind to wait their turn. They would try and say something funny, but their intentions were always hidden.

In a strange English voice, he said: "You are working for Jack, I believe."

Mary said nothing.

To lighten the mood he tried to be funny and quoted the, lyrics from the song by Leslie Hutch: "*I have set my spies on you*."

Mary knew the song and threw it back at him "I am not keeping my eyes on you, so away you go, before I call the police."

"Have you any thing for me?"

Some of the girls at the factory were funny, and she mimicked one who went with her to the dancing: "A right hook if you don't move away."

Mary turned and looked out of the window again. Even though she was sure he was not Wallenberg, she did listen out for his name. She knew now she was in a world where everything was hidden. It was not what the other person said, it was what lay behind the words. She was ready to ask him the question and wait for the answer, but it never came about. He must have got the message, all right, for he left the cafe soon after this.

Mary would go back and look at that nice picture again, then head for the station. She would either get a train tonight, or stay at the flat and try and get one tomorrow.

This afternoon the gallery had a concert going on inside. There was a famous woman playing the piano, so the poster said. She read, with interest, that these concerts were popular during the blitz; it cheered people up.

Mary joined the crowd. The handful of paintings on the wall did not seem all that important now. There was only one man looking at the Gainsborough painting. He wore a double breasted black leather coat; he had his back to her. Mary enjoyed the concert. She did not notice her shadow anywhere. Hopefully, he got the message to disappear. The man in the long double breasted coat stood quite still opposite the picture. Mary walked over for a last look at *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly*. She did not want to interrupt him. However, a furtive glance told her something about him. She noticed he had a fresh weather-beaten face. He looked kind and honest. As he stood there she joined him.

"The painting was painted for his daughters, Mary and Margaret."

Mary could hear his accent was foreign, and right away she asked him:

"Where are you from?"

"I am from Sweden."

"How is Stockholm, these days?

"Cold and expensive."

She went into her bag, and handed the white envelope to him.

He smiled, as he took it: "It will be all over soon."

"I hope so."

CHIARA
ZONA

Men Without Mothers

8
When I was with you
Love was always there
I dreamed of freedom
Life without a care
Now mother has passed to heaven
There is no one there
And when the dream goes
I hope you will be there
Men without mothers
We are everywhere
Mary sat at the window
now she's not there
Mother has passed to heaven
There's no one there
And all the people they just look and stare
They may have known her but they don't really care
Mother has passed to heaven
There is no one there

Return to you

9
Lonely people they are never free
They are captured by a certain honestly
Dreams fall like stars but there are thorns
All life is strange just you wait and see
Mother who danced has now disappeared
And one by one we all must go
I will return to you one day
In my thoughts lie my eternal prayers
When I was young I stood upon your knee
Weightlifter boy
But you just laughed at me
A woman's thoughts I did learn
And now the time has come for me to go
into a world that I do not know
Can I survive along that road
I will return to you one day
In my thoughts lie my eternal prayers

Cosmos Original Records
PPL member
www.cosmos-original-productions.co.uk

Also see

Wall of Fun
Track 4 Mary where did you go?

Music download

https://walkerjohna.wordpress.com/about/

The first part of this story is true - the rest fiction.
JW